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ABSTRACT

In these lessons students gather information from pictures and by listening to recordings from radio shows of the 1930s and 1940s. Students predict how radio changed people's behaviors and survey older adults about their radio listening habits. Students conclude that radio had a big impact on the lives of people in the past and that it lay the groundwork for television. Students also examine the role of radio today with its low cost and small size that contribute to its modern-day use. The sample questions for students to use in the survey are included in the paper along with procedures and suggestions for evaluation. (EH)

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by Mary E. Haas

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HOW DID THE RADIO CHANGE AMERICA?

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Rationale: From the beginning of time sound waves have been present radiating out in all directions from any and all sources of sound. Radio is the invention that sends out or transmits sound waves to a receiver so that the listener can hear the sound even though they may be many miles away. By enabling people to hear all sounds including words, and music, radio was the first of a series of inventions that expanded individual horizons by instantaneously providing new information and entertainment. In less than 40 years radio changed both the source and pattern of communication as barriers of distance were penetrated and jumped. Professional politicians, musicians, entertainers, and sales persons found in radio a new source of followers turning what was originally a local product into national and international reputations. The public soon found that, in relative isolation, they could not only be entertained but potentially manipulated into using their time, wealth, talents, and minds as sound waves produced by others might wish them to respond. Enlightening and destructive messages had always been sent through sound waves, but now the listener needed to carefully weigh the words as they heard them without benefit of eye to eye contact or body language while the addition of sound effects and music stimulated the imagination and potentially clouded rational thought. Radio personalities entered homes as invited guests and became close advisers on life and its choices. Radio moved quickly from transmitting signals capable of helping ships at sea and warring armies communicate and aid with disasters to transmitting to the pubic in general. By World War II airways influenced and/or controlled by business and governments succeeded in unifying some societies and cultures and further separating and dividing others. In the U. S. President Roosevelt used radio to encourage people during the depression and became known as the "radio president." It was his voice that led the way in carrying to the American public messages concerning World War II. The advertises and entertainers, too lent their skills to the cause of winning the war and reporters both informed and entertained the listeners with stories of the soldiers and our allies. In England it was the voice of Winston Churchill that rallied his people in dark days. So powerful was the potential of radio that dictators, including Hitler, arrested people who listened to broadcasts from nations not approved by his communications people or seized radio transmitters to broadcast their views as they sought to take power. When television seized much of the national entertainment audience, radio found that its compact size and low cost enabled it to change its role to one that serves small local audiences with music, sports, and talk formats. In these lessons students will gather information from pictures and by listening to recordings of radio shows from the 1930's and 1940's, predict how the

radio changed people's behaviors, and survey older adults about their radio listening habits. Students will conclude that the radio had a big impact on the lives of people in the past and laid the groundwork for television. They will also conclude that the role of radio today has changed and that the low cost and small size of the radio contributes to its continuing use in today's world.

Objectives: By the end of the lesson students will:

1. gather information about the appearance of early radios by looking at historical pictures.
2. gather information about dramatic radio programs by listening to sample recordings of radio programs from the 1930's and 1940's.
3. gather information about radio programs and listening habits by interviewing their grandparents or people age 60 or over concerning their memories of radio listening.
4. predict ways radio impacted the activities of people who first listened to radio.
5. describe a scene from a dramatic radio program by drawing a picture.
6. identify characteristics of radio shows that they particularly like and think that their grandparents enjoyed and liked.
7. describe changes in the physical appearances of radios over time.
8. describe the advantages that a small size has for radios.
9. describe how the voices of the speakers, music and sound effects make listening to the radio an experience that stimulates the imagination of the listener.
10. list ways in which communication over the radio is different from communicating in person.
11. list ways in which the radio educated and unified the American people.

Suggested Grade: 1-6

Procedures:

Exploratory introduction:

Objective 1: Students identify activities that they like to do after school.

Procedure 1: Ask: "What are some of the activities you do after school?" Record responses. Ask: "Which of these activities do you really enjoy doing?" Place a smiling face beside those identified. If needed ask: "Do you like to watch TV?" Do you think your parents liked to watch TV when they were your age? your grandparents?" "Do you ever listen to the radio after school?"

Formative evaluation 1: Students respond by identifying what they like to do and offer logical answers about their parents and grandparents.

Objective 2: Students will identify radio listening as an activity that many people in the past liked to do.

Procedure 2: Show the children some pictures of people listening to the radio and ask: "Do you think these people are enjoying what they are doing?" "What do you think they are doing?" "Are there any clues that might tell us how long ago these pictures were taken?" Inform the children that the pictures were taken during the 1930's and 1940's when radio listening was a very popular past time for Americans of all ages. This was probably the time when their own grandparents were about the age that they are today.

Formative evaluation 2: Students respond with sincerity to questions.

Body of lesson:

Objective 3: Given a set of pictures of people listening to radios in the past, students will describe the different appearances of radios and contrast them with the radios of today. Students ask clarifying questions about the radios in the pictures as needed.

Procedure 3: Look again at the pictures and ask: "In what ways do these radios look different from radios we have today?" "Why are there big head sets and antenna?" "In which of the pictures are the people broadcasting a show and in which are they listening?" Explain parts of radio as needed. Tell students that the first radios had weak signals and were hard to hear later inventions enabled many people to listen from the same radio without headphones. Ask: "Why do people have headphones for their radios today?"

Evaluation 3: Students identify horn, size, and large headsets as differences. Students correctly identify broadcasting pictures from receiving.

Objective 4: Students predict the kinds of programs broadcast over the radio listened to by the people in the past.

Procedure 4: Look again at the pictures and predict what the people might be listening to on their radios. In what kinds of settings did people use the radio?

Evaluation 4: Students make logical predictions matching programs with likely settings such as music, and news.

Objective 5: Students listen to a radio drama and identify the characteristics of these types of shows and tell how listening to a radio drama is different from watching a TV drama.

Procedure 5: Play for the children a popular radio drama such as an episode of The Lone Ranger or Superman. Inform the students that after the program you will be asking them about their listening experience and the characteristics of the show. Say: "If you enjoyed listening to the radio program raise your hand." Tell students: "I'd

like you to draw me a picture illustrating something you heard in the program." Have the children share their pictures. Ask: "How did you know what to draw?" How did you know what the Lone Ranger (or Superman) should look like?" "What did you like about listening to the radio program?" " How is communicating over the radio different for the actor than talking to a person in person? acting on a TV program?" "In the radio drama what did the broadcast use to help the listener know what was happening or going to happen?"
"What do you think your grandparents or someone about their age would have liked about radio programs?" " What are some questions that we might ask older people about their experiences with the radio when they were young?" List the children's ideas. Prompt the students if needed to ask about favorite programs, when they listened to the radio and any broadcast, commercial, or a particular important incident that they learned about through listening to the radio . Explain that you will give them a copy of the list and that they should ask one adult if not their grandparent someone about the age of their grandparent to help them by answering the questions. Students should record the answers on the questions sheet and ask a parent or their grandparent for help if needed to write the answers. Decide on a date two or three days later when everyone should bring in their answers to share

Closure: What were some of the things we learned about radio and its impact on listeners? When people listened to the radio, how was it different from listening to someone in person? What is the day that we have agreed to when we will bring in our interview questions with an older person?

(End the day's lesson at this point.)

Evaluation 5: Students offer logical and correct answers to teacher's questions. Distribute the interview questionnaire to the students before they go home for the day.

Second day.

Objective 6: Students will identify sound effects and music as having important roles in providing the listener with information to know what is happening in a radio drama.

Procedure 6: Say: Yesterday we listened to a radio drama. Ask: "What was this radio show like? How did you know what was happening in the drama?" Ask: "How do you think they made the sounds of the hoof-beats of a horse running?" "Were their any other important sound effects?" Today we will listen to another episode of XXX and I want you to carefully listen for the different sound effects used in the program also listen to the different pieces of music used. Listen for such things as what kind of music tells the listener that time has passed or danger is near? How is music used at the beginning of the show? Did they hear the same music as you heard yesterday? After listening to the program discuss the sound effects and the use of the music. Ask the children to hum or sing the theme song of the show. If they can not do this, the teacher should hum several songs and see if they can recognize the correct theme. Discuss the characteristics of the theme and why they think the writers might have selected that particular piece of music. Do the children remember what words are used to introduce each episode?" Ask: "Can you fill in the blank?" "Look up in the

sky. It's a bird. It's a plane. It's _____" "Fights a never ending battle for _____ _____" or "A fiery horse with the speed of light, a cloud of dust, and a hardy _____"

Evaluation 6: Students correctly identify various sound effects in the show.
Students correctly tell who music varies with the events of the story.
Students fill in the blanks correctly.

Objective 7: Students identify the kinds of programs heard on radio today as talk, music, and sports and TV as the place where drama programs are performed today.

Procedure 7: Ask: "In what ways is radio listening today different from listening to a radio drama?" "Do radio broadcasts use lots of sound effects today?" Do shows have musical themes to introduce them?" "Are there still commercials on radio shows?" Get a listing of the radio shows on the local station and display it. Determine what kinds of shows are on the local radio today by classifying the programs. Ask: "Why might these be the choices of people listening to the radio today instead of the radio dramas?" (People listen to dramas on the TV and tend to listen to the radio in the car or at random times during the day instead of at specific times each day.) Music, sports, local information especially news and traffic, and talk dominate the radio programs today. Many of the stations play only one particular type of music such as country, rock, or rap. Ask: "In the future do you think that TV will take over the types of programing now found on radio and that radio stations will go out of business and become a thing of the past?" "Why?"

Closure: We have seen that the role of radio has changed over time ask" "What is one way in which it has changed?" "Do you think radio will still be around for your grandchildren to listen to?" "Why?"

Evaluation 7: Students read names of programs on the schedule and classify the programs.
Students say that dramas are on the TV today and not on the radio.

Objective 8: Students examine the answers from the interviews they conducted and make accurate conclusions based upon the answers to the questionnaires.

Procedure 8: Have the students cut apart their questionnaires so that each question is separate from the others. Collect all of the answers to each questions separately and assign students to small groups. Distribute the answers to one or two of the questions to each group. Groups should read the answers to one question at a time and tally and group the answers. When all are finished the teacher holds a class discussion in which each group reports the findings for their question(s). The teacher then guides the children in forming conclusions on the answers to each of the questions. Ask: "Did any of the adults we interviewed give similar answers to the question?" "Which answer(s) was / were given by the largest numbers of adults?" "Which by the smallest number?" Why might there be differences in the answers we got to our questions?" "Which questions had the biggest number of different answers?" "Based upon all of these answers what can we say about the importance of the radio to the lives of your

grandparents and their friends when they were children?" " What do you think that radio did for the American people?" "Do you think that the radio helped to remove differences between people in the country?" "Why? Why not?" "Raise your hand if you learned something new about your grandparents or older friend by doing the interview."

Closure: In the past few days we have been learning about the radio and its impact on the lives of people in the past and on our lives. "What are some things we have learned that you could share with your grandparent or older friend?" I'd like you to write a thank you note to your grandparent or friend for helping in our study of the radio and tell the person some of the things we have learned.

Evaluation 8: Students work cooperatively in processing the data.
Students form accurate conclusions based upon the answers from the interview data.

Formal evaluation: Read the thank you notes before sending them to the adults.

For children in the upper grades, the teacher can add a study of commercials, and the impact of the war on the news and commercial on radio during the war. Additional questions might also be added to the questionnaire on these subjects.

References:

Great American Audio Corporation. The Best of Old-Time Radio Classics. 33 Portman Road, New Rochelle, NY 10801. Sources of audio tapes for all types of programs from the "Golden Age of Radio."

Petrosk, Henry. "Radio Days." CIVILIZATION 4(1): 64-73. February/ March 1997. This article is from the Library of Congress magazine and is filled with black and white pictures from their collection showing radio use in its early days.

Tripp, Valerie. Molly's Surprise: A Christmas Story. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Company. The illustrator Nick Backes has a nice drawing of the family around the radio.

Questionnaire

Dear Parent, We are currently studying about the role radio has and does play in the lives of people. Your child has an assignment to ask someone 60 years old or older the following questions about the radio in the next couple of days. Please help your child to contact a grandparent or neighbor in this age group so that they can complete the assignment. You may also help your child to record the answers to the questions on the sheet, but please see that your child does actually listen to the adult and ask the questions if at all possible.

1. Did your family have a radio when you were young? What did it look like?

2. When did you listen to the radio?

3. What was your favorite program?

4. What did you like best about the program?

5. Do you remember how did the program started or ended?

6. Who were some of your favorite radio characters or performers?

7. What do you remember most about listening to the radio?

8. Did you learn about any important historical event by listening to the radio?

9. Did the radio have commercials? What were they like? Can you remember any of the commercials today?

10. Do you still like to listen to the radio today? How is radio different from when you were my age?